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ABSTRACT

Children's television programs broadcast on Saturday mornings (7:00am-12:00pm) on CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox networks were examined for gender and ethnic representation. For a sample of programs during the 1995/96 television season, raters counted the number of males and females, and the number of Caucasians, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans presented in the programs. Raters then computed the amount of time each character appeared and spoke during the program. The results showed that the male to female ration was 4/1 on CBS, 4/1 on Fox, 3/1 on ABC, and 1/1 on NBC. Male characters spoke more (an average of 10 minutes and 46 seconds) than female characters (an average of 2 minutes and 55 seconds). Caucasian and ethnic minority representation was 73.6 percent and 26.4 percent respectively; these percentages are very close to the groups' actual percentages in the United States population. There was a difference in the representation of race in major roles (roles in which a character speaks and is present at least 20 percent of the total program time). ABC and Fox under-represented ethnic minorities in major roles, CBS over-represented ethnic minorities in major roles, and NBC represented both ethnic minorities and Caucasians in major roles in proportions equal to their proportions in the United States population. Ethnic minority females were not represented at all in major roles on ABC and NBC, and were represented on CBS and Fox 16 percent and 5 percent of the time, respectively. (AS)

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Gender and Ethnic Portrayals in Saturday Morning Television Programs

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Gender and Ethnic Portrayals in Saturday Morning Television Programs

Sandra L. Calvert, Alison Stolkin, and Jason Lee

Television presents a symbolic world in which power relations are depicted (Gerbner, Signorielli, Morgan & Jackson-Beeck, 1979). Being present in programming and playing a major role, particularly a speaking role in which one's voice is heard, are two ways that these power relations are conveyed. Compared to U.S. Census data, men and Caucasians have historically been overrepresented on television at the expense of women and members of ethnic minority groups (Greenberg, 1988). Because television is a major source of information about people, biased depictions influence the beliefs of our youth (Calvert & Huston, 1987).

The purpose of this study was to examine current gender and ethnic portrayals presented in Saturday morning television programs. To do so, a content analysis was conducted on a 1995/96 sample of programs from CBS, NBC, ABC, and FOX .

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were children's television programs from the 4 major networks during the 1995/96 season. Programs were videotaped from 7:00am - 12:00pm, a traditional children's television time frame. Because many of the programs broadcast during this time frame are now adult news programs that children rarely watch, only the children's programs were examined. These programs were *It's Academic*, *Saved by the Bell*, *Hang Time*, and *California Dreams* for NBC; *The Adventures of Captain Planet*, *Free Willy*, *Fudge*, *Re-Boot*, and *the Bugs Bunny and Tweety Show* for ABC; *Beakman's World*, *Really Wild Animals*, *Timon and Pumba*, *Aladdin*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Santo Bugito*, *Felix the Cat*, *Reality Check*, and *Mask* for CBS; and *Fantastic Four*, *X-men*, *Spiderman*, *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, *Where is Carmen San Diego*, *Eed Strava Ganza*, *The Terrible Thunderlizards*, *Masked Rider*, *The Tick*, *Life with Louie*, and *Not Just News* for FOX.

For each program, raters counted 1) the number of males and females; and 2) the number of Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans presented in children's programs. Then they computed 1) the amount of time each character appeared on the screen; and 2) the amount of time that each character spoke.

RESULTS

First, we compared the number of male and female characters depicted on the four networks. As seen in Table 1, male characters were more prevalent than female

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Insert Table 1 about here

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characters in children's television programs, $^{2}_{(3)} = 82.11$, $p < .0001$; the male to female ratio was 4/1 on CBS, 4/1 on FOX, and 3/1 on ABC; only NBC presented male and female characters in a 1/1 ratio, approximating the real-life prevalence of men and women in the U.S. population.

Next we examined the time that each character was on

screen. As seen in Table 2, men averaged 27 minutes, 38

Insert Table 2 about here

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seconds of screen time per 30 minute program, but women were on screen only 7 minutes, 28 seconds.

Because speaking roles connote importance and the potential visibility of characters, we also examined speaking roles in children's programs. As predicted, male characters spoke more than female characters did. Across stations, male characters spoke an average of 10 minutes, 46 seconds whereas female characters only spoke 2 minutes, 55 seconds. Compared to female characters, then, male time on screen and speaking time was quadrupled. See Table 2.

Our second area of analysis concerned presentations of ethnic minorities in children's television programs. First, we examined the frequency of ethnic minority characters presented on the four stations in relation to their real-life numbers, as indicated by the 1995 Census data. Contrary to

prediction, Caucasian and ethnic minority members were presented in similar proportions (73.6% vs. 26.4%) to their real-life numbers in the U.S. population (73.7% vs. 26.3%).

Next, we examined the amount of time that these characters appeared on the screen. As seen in Table 3, the

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Insert Table 3 about here

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overall amount of time that ethnic minorities were present roughly paralleled the 1995 Census data. However, a different picture emerged when major and minor roles were considered. Major roles, which required characters to speak and to be present on screen a minimum of 20% of the total program time, favored Caucasians. ABC and FOX underrepresented members of ethnic minorities in major roles, but CBS actually overrepresented minority group members. NBC presented ethnic minorities in major roles consistent to their real-life presence in the U.S. population, until the gender of characters was considered. As seen

Table 4. except for CBS, minority females were invisible.

Insert Table 4 about here

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that Caucasian males dominant television programs. Caucasian males were more prevalent in children's programs than in real life, they spent more time on screen, and they played major speaking roles more than females or members of ethnic minorities did. In fact, men had more speaking time than women had screen time.

Improvements in the visibility of ethnic minorities are occurring, but only for men. Ethnic minority females were notably absent in children's television depictions.

As a socialization agent, television can be a potent force for altering children's schemas about other groups, or television can reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes (Calvert & Huston, 1987). Children's television programs maintain the status quo far more often than they challenge it.

Table 1

Number of Males and Females in Children's Saturday Morning Television Programs by Network Affiliate.

	Male Characters	Female Characters	Male/Female Ratio
ABC	164	53	3/1
NBC	270	202	1/1
CBS	256	66	4/1
FOX	642	171	4/1
TOTALS	1332	492	3/1

According to the 1995 Census, men are 49% and women are 51% of the U.S. population.

Table 2

Percent of Time on Screen and Time Speaking by Gender and Network Affiliate.

	Men on Screen	Women on Screen	Men Speaking	Women Speaking
ABC	26 min, 39 s	8 min, 38 s	9 min, 14 s	3 min, 27 s
NBC	30 min	10 min, 34 s	10 min	3 min, 23 s
CBS	29 min, 8 s	6 min, 8 s	15 min, 3 s	2 min, 38 s
FOX	25 min, 43 s	7 min, 28 s	8 min, 14 s	2 min, 45 s
Mean	27 min, 38 s	7 min, 28 s	10 min, 46 s	2 min, 55 s

Table 3

Percent of Ethnic Groups Appearing in Children's Television Programs by Network Affiliate.

	Total Presence		Major Characters		1995 U.S. Census Data	
	Caucasian	Ethnic Minority	Caucasian	Ethnic Minority	Caucasian	Ethnic Minority
ABC	68%	32%	100%	0%	73.7%	26.3%
NBC	70%	30%	73%	27%		
CBS	59%	41%	62%	38%		
FOX	80%	20%	89%	11%		

Percent of time data parallel the 1995 U.S. Census data. Within ethnic minority groups, African Americans comprise 12%, Hispanics 10.3%, Asians 3.3%, and Native Americans .7% of the population.

Table 4

Percent of Ethnic Groups by Major Character, Gender, and Network Affiliate.

	Caucasian		Ethnic Minority		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
ABC	75%	25%	0%	0%	75%	25%
NBC	66%	7%	27%	0%	93%	7%
			(Af. Am. 20%	0%)		
			(Asian 7%	0%)		
CBS	46%	15%	23%	16%	69%	31%
			(Arabian 15%	0%)		
			(Hispanic 8%	8%)		
			(Native Am 0%	8%)		
FOX	69%	21%	5%	5%	74%	26%
			(Af. Am. 5%	5%)		

The specific ethnic background of characters is indicated in parentheses.

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